Loss of Tigers in Panna Tiger Reserve

335. SHRI BHAGIRATHI MAJHI : Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a Special Investigation Team set up to go into the loss of Panna Tigers, has blamed poaching for the loss of tiger population from the Panna Reserve and attributed it to the failure of State Government authorities;

(b) if so, the steps taken and proposed to be taken by Government in the matter; and

(c) whether the SIT headed by Shri R.K. Sen had also examined the tiger conservation set up in Panna a year back; if so, the main observations and suggestions made by SIT in that context?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH) : (a) and (b) The Government of India had constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to look into the causative factors for disappearance of tigers from the Panna Tiger Reserve. The SIT has submitted its report and attributed the main cause of tiger disappearance to poaching. The report has been forwarded to the State Government of Madhya Pradesh for taking appropriate administrative and ecological measures.

(c) A Committee comprising of Shri P.K. Sen and others was constituted for an appraisal of tiger status in the Panna Tiger Reserve during 2008. The observations / findings of the said Committee are given in the Statement.

Statement

Observations of the Committee

1. The Panna Tiger Reserve is in the Central Highlands, having dry deciduous forest. In last two years, rainfall was scanty, therefore, drought conditions prevail. Ken River is flowing through the Reserve over 55 kms, making pools of water in various places and may be considered as the lifeline of the Panna Tiger Reserve. There is water availability in many other areas of the Reserve, as seen from the road and while walking through the various beat compartments.

2. Most of the area is rocky and the road surface is very hard. Therefore, many of the pugmarks were not very clear. Pug Mark Impression Pads have been created all over the Reserve which are refreshed every morning by the Reserve staff.

3. Groups of sambhar, spotted, deer, blue bull, chinkara and wild boars have been observed in all 4 ranges. 2 four horned antelope have also been seen, therefore, the team concluded that there is no dearth of prey species. Signs of ungulates were evident in every area visited.

4. Signs of bear are evident in many places.

5. Pugmarks of leopards and lesser cats have also been noted. These were noted in many places; also while looking at tiger tracks along the roads.

6. One tiger moved along the bank of river Ken on the early morning of the 10th of January, 2008. Its pugmarks were captured in camera in softer soil as well as in dust and hard surface through out the track of about a kilometer. Alarm calls of langur and spotted deer were heard in the adjoining area.

7. Large numbers of cattle have been observed in almost every area. Cattle comprise feral cattle which number about 1400, semi feral cattle which have been let free by the villagers, which number around 4000. About 5600 village cattle graze in the Park freely. This is a matter of grave concern and the Park authorities have taken initiatives to transport feral and semi feral cattle outside the Park to 'Gau Sadans'. About 4000 cattle out of a population of nearly 6000 feral and semi feral cattle have been transported out to distance away from the Reserve. It is expected that village cattle will move out with the relocation of the villagers.

Recommendations of the Committee

1. The field Director and his staff appeared to be quite motivated and therefore their continuity is a must. Even if the Field Director is promoted, he should be allowed to stay in the Park for a considerable period, as he has been able to motivate the subordinate staff to a large extent. The staff appears to be quite dedicated, knowledgeable about the terrain and enthusiastic in their work.

2. The higher authorities in the State appear to be supporting the Field Director in in his initiative. The proposed new areas to be included in a buffer of the Park should be notified as early as possible.

3. The adjoining forest of Uttar Pradesh also forms a part of the tiger corridor and therefore, a continuing dialogue between the two States - Ultar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh is necessary.

4. It is very difficult to estimate the number of tigers. Male female ratio as stated earlier is a matter of concern. The total number of pugmarks analyzed suggests that 7 tigers mostly males, are present in the areas seen by the team. There may be 2 semi adult tigers also. However, it must be noted that the team has relied mostly upon pugmarks on PIPs. Other evidences recorded are of a kill, scats and alarm calls. Tigers have been sighted by tourists and staff in the beginning of January, therefore, any absence of tiger from the Reserve is not correct.

5. It is strongly recommended that a verification of the population/presence of tigers be done by camera trapping by a team of experts from Wildlife Institute of India. This will also establish the male / female ratio of tigers and presence of cubs.

6. The Park management should develop their own capacity of camera trapping for continuous monitoring. This will improve the capacity within the Reserve for better monitoring and management.

7. There is a need to bring out more information regarding the Reserve and specifically of tigers in the public sphere. This will also underline the good work that has been observed in the Panna Tiger Reserve.

8. The involvement of local people and groups may be considered in taking constructive suggestions and building a support network around the Reserve.

9. A team of experts should visit the Park during the summer months of 2008 to evaluate the progress made on continuing management interventions and the impact of actions proposed to be taken.

Butterfly parks in Andhra Pradesh

336. SHRIMATI T. RATNA BAI : Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government has any proposal to open the butterfly parks and gardens;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, by when such parks would come up in each State especially in Andhra Pradesh?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH) : (a) No Sir, There is no proposal to open butterfly parks and gardens.

(b) and (c) Does not arise.

Illegal mining units

337. SHRI A. VIJAYARAGHAVAN : Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT & FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of mining units identified as functioning illegally in the country causing environmental and health hazards, State-wise; and

(b) whether Government is planning any steps to book such units under the existing laws?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI JAIRAM RAMESH) : (a) Mining activities without requisite environmental safeguards are known to have adverse impacts on different components of environment including human health. Press reports have appeared from time to time reporting illegal mining in different parts of the country.

(b) The State Governments are the owners of minerals and since the minerals rights and collection of revenue and matters related to police, law and order machinery vest with State Governments, the State Governments have been empowered under Section 23C of Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Act, 1957 to frame Rules for prevention of illegal